First in Math:

An Educational Technology Product

Propelling our Students into the Competitive Future

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In my school district, elementary students are motivated to learn math skills necessary to be competitive in the future global market through the First In Math® Online Mathematics Program. Based on the game “24” created by Robert Sun in 1988, Suntex International Inc created this program to transform rote memorization of facts into an easily accessible, exciting way to interact with and understand mathematics. The only technology requirements for using this product are a computer with internet access and a pass code that averages $8.00 per student, with discounts available for purchasing multiple codes. After purchasing the log-in license, students may access their account from any computer, at school or at home. First In Math is appropriate for addition- through algebra-ready students, and each area aligns to standards established by the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics.

The First In Math program is designed to supplement the regular education curriculum by giving students the fundamental skills they need to achieve success in math. It delivers fluency in basic addition, subtraction, multiplication and division, while advancing higher-order thinking skills such as mental math, problem solving, pattern sensing, reasoning and number sense. It is imperative that students develop these higher-order thinking skills in order to obtain future success. In such a globally competitive market, it is important for students to possess the skills to reason and think logically, not simply regurgitate information (any computer program can successfully complete that task).

The program employs a sequential approach to learning; students start on "easier" material and work through more challenging content. Every module includes positive feedback to boost confidence, from congratulatory phrases such as “Awesome Job!” and “You’re HOT!” floating across the screen, to receiving the award of a bonus game. Through these rewards, students experience the satisfaction of knowing they are gaining speed and accuracy and are becoming successful in math.

The program does foster competitiveness among students by keeping record of the “Player of the Day” and supplying top point-earners with VIP passes on lanyards that students wear with pride throughout the day. Students are able to keep track of the points they earn and often compare these points with each other to see how they compare to their classmates. I did not approve of this competitive spirit initially, but it really does work to motivate the majority of my students. In fact, students get fairly upset when I don’t have the daily player posted right away each math class. I do not assign the program as homework, as I have read in various online news forums that requiring participation has led to *parents* working on the assignments at home in place of the students. The only incentive that I provide is that I announce the Player of the Day each morning, which is decided by the number of stickers (points) earned in the previous 24 hours, as well as the top 3 players in our class. The program also allows students to compare their standings with the rest of our school, county, state, or nation. It is pretty impressive to see how our students compare to students nationwide in their commitment to the program.

Robert Sun, the creator of the game “24,” the foundation for this educational product, claims that the 21st century will be defined by technological, scientific and mathematical advancement and America’s prominence in this age cannot be assured without talented students. Suntex International, Inc believes that the First in Math program can serve as a tool to help create a new “generation of thinkers” prepared to take on the challenges of the future (www.firstinmath.com). In my opinion, if students are learning math on their own personal time and actually enjoying doing so, the program is already a great success.

*Resources:*

Suntex International, Inc. (2006). *Gifted Students Embrace First In Math® Online Program: Comprehensive Program Empowers K-2 Students to Achieve at Sixth-grade Level.* Retrieved from http://firstinmath.com/